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THE ROLE OF STATE BOARDS AND COORDINATORS:  
APPOINTMENTS AND COMPOSITION

Cleo A. Hughes

The question of who appoints the coordinator is tied to the question of eligibility for the role of coordinator. At present, the coordinator is the head of the state archival agency or the head of the state-funded historical agency. If both agencies exist, the agency head not appointed coordinator is to be appointed to the board. The agency head may appoint someone within the agency to act as coordinator rather than assuming the job himself.

There are states which do not have well-developed archival programs, and whose archival agency therefore does not have an individual with the necessary experience, expertise, and/or staff support to be an effective coordinator. In other states, the archives might be well developed, but the archivist may be unsympathetic to the program, or may be too involved in other projects to assume the responsibility. In those states, the program suffers.

Several alternatives to the automatic appointment of the head of the archival or historical agency as the coordinator have been mentioned. One alternative would be to appoint the head of an active private historical association or society, if his or her duties include responsibility for a large number of original

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records. Another possibility is appointment of the head of a well-developed municipal or university archives. There may be a large, private archives/manuscripts repository, equivalent to a well-developed state program, whose archivist could act as coordinator. The employing organization would, of course, have to agree to support the coordinator's work with the board.

So these appear to be our options: the state archivist, head of the state-funded historical agency, head of a private historical association, head of a large municipal archives, head of a large academic archives, or head of a large, private archives/manuscripts repository. It would be easier to suggest alternatives if we already had a functioning archives evaluation system, which I do not expect to see for several years, and a strict accreditation system for archivists, which can only come about through a minor miracle.

This brings us to the appointment of the coordinator. Presently, the governor appoints the coordinator, which should signify the willingness of the state to give at least minimal support to the program. Since the coordinator was initially defined as being the full-time professional official in charge of the state archival agency, one would assume that there is little question as to the identity of the coordinator. However, this definition has been interpreted in several ways in different states. As a result, the coordinator is not always an archivist, but is sometimes an administrator in the agency to which the archives answers. This would be a slight advantage to the state's archival program, since it would possibly then have more attention from the governor's office, but it is difficult to see how it would benefit the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC) program. Appointment of the coordinator by the governor may bring publicity for the NHPRC program, and



travel funds for the board may be easier to obtain. This varies from state to state.

The head of the archival agency might appoint the coordinator, with the option of appointing himself, if qualified. In some states, it would not be legally possible for such a person to make that appointment if any state funds, including official time, were used, unless the archival agency is independent; that is, reporting directly to the governor. The governor could appoint the coordinator with the advice and consent of the head of the archival agency. Under this system, a well-qualified person should be located and, more often than not, would be the archivist giving the advice and consenting.

There is another alternative to appointment of a coordinator, and that is through election by board members from among their number. Ideally, this individual would be selected by his or her peers as an acknowledgment of expertise and leadership abilities. The difficulty is that situations are not always ideal, and personalities play a very strong part in elections. However, this could be a satisfactory option, which would rotate the burden among board members and their institutions. For example, a board member who is the head of a large history department in a university which has a strong program in history would be eligible for the coordinator's role.

The term of office would need to be considered after eligibility is determined. As narrowly defined as the present eligibility is, a term of office may be almost meaningless. The current four-year appointment is working because of the limit on eligibility. Either the coordinator has simply (or not so simply) worked the duties into an already full schedule, or has assigned responsibilities to staff members, or has ducked the problem altogether and has an inactive program. If eligibility is expanded, then a term is necessary, since organizations do need to know the

length of time for which employees are obligated.

The term of office most practical for the coordinator will depend a great deal upon the board, as well as upon the condition of the original records in the state. A coordinator who is called upon frequently to arrange and conduct meetings, distribute numerous grant applications, analyze the returned evaluations, and consult with the NHPRC staff might need a shorter term than the coordinator in a state which is sparsely populated, has a well-developed archival program, and very few grant applications, for whatever reason. The latter individuals could well serve four years without noticing any strain on their schedules.

A one-year term would work for a coordinator elected by the board, if the board members were all active and aware of the total business of the board. This would almost require three to four meetings a year. An appointive term of one year may not be practical, since it is difficult to go through all the steps necessary for governmental appointments on a yearly basis.

Two- to three-year terms possibly would be more practical than one year, because the coordinator then would have an opportunity to develop expertise in the role, including a system for meeting deadlines. The appointment process would not be as difficult with the longer terms, if appointment is continued as the method of selecting the coordinator. One drawback that could occur would be the election of a board member as coordinator to a two- or three-year term, when that member had only one year remaining on the board. Provision would have to be made for extending that member's appointment. Prior service on the board for one full term might be made a requirement for coordinator.



Initially, appointments to the state boards were recommended by the governor and approved by NHPRC. After the first round of appointments, the system slipped, and we now find governors appointing and NHPRC being notified and confirming. This has been accepted by NHPRC. In most states, the head of the archival agency has had a major hand in selecting appointees, but not in all states. Problems have arisen in filling board vacancies when the governor's appointments secretary does not give a high priority to the vacancies, and when suggestions for appointments run afoul of political considerations. For the most part, the lack of high priority has been the problem.

Alternatives to the governor's appointment of board members include appointment by the coordinator, a shared appointing power between the governor and the coordinator, and appointment by either or both with the advice of state or regional archival associations, if any.

Should the coordinator make the appointments without confirmation by the governor's office, vacancies would be far fewer, and the coordinator would be assured of having qualified people on the board. However, each contact with the governor's office, whether through a request for appointment of a board member or through an annual report, does increase awareness of the state program. The loss of that visibility, although not great in most states, would be a concern to those who established a relationship with the governor through NHPRC. Increased awareness of the state archives is not necessarily the function of NHPRC, however, and in numbers the vast majority of grants do not go to state programs.

If the appointing power is shared by the coordinator and the governor, with each appointing half of the board, the delay by an appointments secretary would not be so crucial. It is most likely that the coordinator would appoint archivists, and would thus

be able to carry on grant application evaluations. An interesting question of hierarchy could come into play if the coordinator is appointed by the governor. It would appear that those board members appointed by the governor could have a different conception of their relationship to the coordinator and the board than those board members appointed by the coordinator, who would be an extra step removed from the governor. Would they be less equal? Personalities would be a strong factor.

Appointment by the coordinator, acting with the advice of the state or regional association, is an interesting alternative, and it is feasible if an association exists. The association would have to agree to such a partnership, and some method would have to be devised for regional associations to appoint committees for each state. Archivists would certainly have involvement, if that is the goal.

If the coordinator selects board members and the governor appoints them, you have what is probably the system most used today. This has the pitfalls first mentioned--the delay by the appointments secretary and potential political problems in having nominees confirmed.

The present requirement for boards is that 50 percent of the members shall be archivists, or have had archival training and experience. This does not appear to be unreasonable, except in a few states where there are not many archivists and the board is large. In the past, that 50 percent could include persons with extensive research experience in original records. The historians are no longer counted among the 50 percent archival membership.

Federal regulations insure that the board will have some expertise. It could also be argued that since NHPRC does rely somewhat on board recommendations for grant applications, it should be able to require



specific backgrounds for those on whom it relies. A drawback is that regulations which are too strict might not allow for radical differences among the talent available in each state.

Clearance, or confirmation, by NHPRC prior to each appointment would insure adherence to guidelines, thereby strengthening the boards. It would also take the burden from the coordinator of declining a nomination by the governor of one who is not qualified and place that burden on NHPRC. The disadvantages would be having to justify any deviations caused by local conditions and, what might be more important, keeping the governor from appointing board members outright, as many are presently doing.

Fifty percent of those on the board must have an archival background. This background should produce critical evaluations of grant proposals. Archival needs within the states would be better known if a larger proportion of the board members were archivists, since a greater number of institutions would be represented. In addition, meetings would be shorter and therefore more productive, since all would be speaking the same language.

At present, evaluating the plan of work and the budget is the province of the professional members of the board. The nonprofessional members contribute toward evaluating the significance of the proposed project, but can say little about other factors. To require archival experience of all members of the board would limit the evaluation of the significance of the project. Historians generally do know what is being studied and why, what is lacking, and what might be most helpful to develop. Many historians have extensive research experience, more extensive than the archivists on the board, and their evaluations are important.



The federal regulations might include citizen representation on the board, adding expertise in a number of user areas and giving a variety of opinions on grant applications. There would be education through exposure to programs with a variety of allied endeavors, thus promoting archives in general. Information about records not in repositories would be more readily available.

There are several disadvantages to citizen representation on the board. The burden of evaluating the plan of work and the budget would fall on a few. Educating members is a lengthy process, especially if few grant proposals are received, and would take much time which the coordinator may not have. All kinds of special interests might want to be represented, and places on the board might have to be made for those groups which are accustomed to being on other citizen boards (e.g., handicapped, minorities, disadvantaged, women) even though their interests are not germane. It might be difficult in some states to get a board which would have enough professional archivists to balance the various special interests.

Local historical societies know of potential projects and could encourage grant applications and the concept of archives development. These are NHPRC concerns. Most local historical societies are not familiar with processing costs, research use, and archival plans of work, however. Finding a representative local historical society member who would be knowledgeable about potential projects across the state would be difficult in some states, especially those which do not have a statewide county historians' association or other statewide organization.

Local government representation would have to come from the records field, either records management or archives. In states without local records schedules, a member of the county clerks' or municipal clerks' association might have historically inclined

members. This representation would have potential benefits to local records preservation, since it would raise the consciousness of local officials regarding the proper preservation of records. This can, of course, be accomplished in other ways, such as appearances by archivists on the programs of the associations' annual meetings.

Professional historians have been board members since the program began. They tend to be users of original records; they know what has potential. Some are experienced grantsmen and can spot padding; they can recognize and interpret jargon (having participated in its use on other occasions). They have no expertise in processing or interpreting a budget, for the most part. Generally, the professional historians are strong board members, critical but enthusiastic. It is not possible for me to present a disadvantage to having professional historians on the board, so long as they are balanced by the more pragmatic archivists.

Records managers have not been generally included on boards, although there are some. Many times these individuals are very competent in evaluating microfilm proposals, and they recognize systems problems. They can be quite helpful. If the board is limited in number, however, it might be better for the board to develop some "expert" lists and have a records manager or two willing to comment on grants on which this expertise is needed.

Members of the legislature would be useful to some state boards where the board wishes to "showcase" what the state agency needs, or if the board wishes to have state legislation passed which would apply to local records situations. Some legislators are fascinated by history and would be good lay members. The question arises as to whether a board can afford the extra person who may or may not attend meetings or return meaningful evaluation forms (especially during



legislative session) in exchange for sponsorship of state-funded records programs.

Genealogists are definitely in the records retention business. A genealogist would probably be one of the most faithful members of the board. The difficulty would be in ratings, since most genealogists would probably rate proposals higher than a practicing archivist would rate them. Appointing genealogists would certainly add another dimension. Some boards may have genealogists on them at present; the requirement is not there.

A representative of a professional archival group is difficult to rationalize except as a means of adding another archivist, unless the representative were an "interested member" or associate member of the association rather than an archivist. An advantage might be that the representative could express the organization's point of view on such matters as the statement of priorities and preferred approaches.

To require citizen participation on the board might burden the professional archivists beyond their willingness to carry these unrelated people, especially if they were 50 percent of the board. However, not to allow them on the board (i.e., to require that the board be made up only of archivists or archivists and historians) would seriously handicap some states which do not have a large pool of archivists and users of archives from which to draw. This problem is closely tied to the size of the board.

The size of the board must have some bearing on representatives from areas other than archives. The average board today is eight to nine people. That gives enough input for evaluating grants, but is not too large a number to arrange meetings. The requirement is six, plus the coordinator. Because five evaluations must be received, there is a problem with a minimum board if two members are out of state at the



time or fail to complete an evaluation. On the other hand, large boards are difficult to schedule for meetings, expensive to provide with applications, time-consuming in education, and expensive to provide with travel and per diem funds.

Small boards have their advantages, particularly if the number of grant applications is small. They permit very close communication and very thorough discussions. However, with large boards, committee work can be done, especially if the state needs extensive federal assistance. Not all members would have to study each proposal thoroughly, at least until the proposals were reported out of the committee. The coordinator would have to have a fair amount of time to devote to a large board.

Much depends upon the state of the archival art within the state, the population, the age of the state, and the available staff at the archival agency. A board smaller than six members risks a limited viewpoint, while a board larger than ten or twelve risks repetition in discussion and expense which the state agency may not be able to absorb. Some states are working well with large boards, others with small. Other states are working poorly. A question might be asked as to how much the size of the board helps or hurts the program.

Terms of office of the board are presently three years, with unlimited reappointments. In states where reappointment has been requested of the governor but no action has been taken, the members have been allowed to continue to serve. The question has been raised as to whether or not terms should be for specified periods.

There are advantages to specified terms. It is difficult for some to accept an indeterminate term, but they might be willing to give two or three years of service. Occasionally mistakes are made in

appointments, and at least with a specified term the mistakes are correctable in the foreseeable future. In addition, most employing agencies prefer to know the extent of the commitment before agreeing to release time for out-of-office activity. There is a danger in unspecified terms that one group might ensconce itself and become a rather closed society, which would not be good for the program. With specified terms, there is some turnover in membership, bringing fresh perspectives to the records problems.

There is an advantage to some indeterminate terms and to unlimited reappointments. Expertise and advocacy are developed. Board members cannot grasp the total picture of a state's archival needs in a short term, and too fast a turnover in the board will cause a loss of continuity, as well as inability to grasp a sense of the total problem. Reappointment could be important, because the board position is not usually held by junior staff members, and therefore there is a limit on the number of professional people available.

This leads to the question of concurrent or staggered appointments. Concurrent appointments will not affect continuity if reappointments are allowed, since by the very nature of the board, there would be reappointments. Staggered appointments would insure continuity and lessen the education problems of the coordinator. The difficulty with staggered terms comes with the appointment process. There always seems to be an appointment pending with the governor's appointments secretary, and this gets to be a burden for the coordinator. Staggered terms do prevent a "clean sweep," if appointments are tied to politics. The clean sweep could be an advantage or a disadvantage, but generally is not the preferred approach.

There is a final question of enlarging the number of ex officio members of the board. At present, only the head of the state archives and the head of a state-funded historical agency hold appointments by



virtue of their positions. In the discussion of who is eligible for the coordinator's position, several additional areas from which such a person might come were identified. It would be difficult to write a regulation which would cover these suggestions adequately, and it is also difficult to write a federal regulation which would automatically place such individuals on a board. To name the governor or the speakers of either house of the assembly as ex officio is possible, but it is difficult to see an advantage.

Appointments and composition of the board are crucial to the success of the program. I hope that in our discussion this afternoon we can come to some positive conclusions which will be agreeable to all of you tomorrow.